

## Middle East Report by Thierry Lalevée

### Turkey: target of narco-terrorism

*The Iranians have flooded their neighbor to the north with drugs—part of Soviet operations against NATO's southern flank.*

**A**part from the ratification of a deal for the construction of a pipeline between Iran and Turkey, the item which will top the agenda of discussions between Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal and the Iranian leadership on Feb. 28 will be drugs and terrorism.

Despite numerous verbal promises made last July by Iranian Prime Minister Hussein Moussavi during his visit to Ankara, Iran has flooded Turkey with drugs and heroin over the last year. This reached such a critical point in the first weeks of the year that in early February, Ankara announced that it was deploying its regular armed forces to the border with Iran, to beef up border guards visibly overwhelmed by the situation.

A few figures show the change in recent years. Turkish police seized a mere 47 kilos of heroin coming from Iran in 1985. They seized more than 545 kilos during the first 11 months of 1987. Turkish officials acknowledged that these seizures, however large, may have represented only 10% of what is actually being smuggled in the 3,500 trucks daily crossing the Iranian-Turkish border.

TIR trucks, which are given inspection-free passage across European borders, are only one aspect of the smuggling. For example, it was learned that many Iranians allowed to leave the country had a special price to pay. Beside the usual *baksheesh* to buy passports, many are ordered to smuggle varying quantities of drugs into Istanbul. From there, the drugs join the usual Bulgarian connection, being placed aboard the many trucks passing through, reaching West Ger-

many and later Amsterdam. Part of that traffic was exposed last summer after a series of shootouts involving Iranians and Iraqis in Istanbul.

Iran's decision to flood the European market with drugs, including many shipments smuggled across Afghanistan with Soviet complicity, has several purposes. Intelligence reports suggest that, confronted with a severe economic crisis, the Iranian mullahs have given the green light for use of all of "Iran's natural resources," to bridge the gap in the budget. Drugs are such a "natural resource" in the eyes of the holy mullahs. A wave of executions of drug-smugglers inside Iran has only meant that the trade has been "nationalized." Private initiative in such matters is considered a threat to the state's coffers.

The Revolutionary Guards, or Pasdarans, led by Mohsen Rezai are responsible for implementing the policy, and receive the bulk of the monies. For the Pasdarans, the traffic has enormous advantages. It provides them with the hard currency needed to buy the weapons on international markets, even at inflated prices. They can also create self-supporting units abroad, using the proceeds of drug traffic to pay their own way.

The security implications are obvious, and that has the Turkish authorities extremely worried. Their worry was confirmed by the dismantling of a 15-member group of Pasdarans in northern Italy in late November. Functioning primarily as an intelligence-gathering cell, the Pasdarans masqueraded as university students, and were in the process of creating a

large intelligence network based on their contacts with neo-Nazi organizations. Their main aim was to establish a network for spying on the activities of, and assassinating, anti-Khomeini Iranians. When the group was dismantled, enough drugs were found in the apartments of the unit's members to indicate that this was a large and profitable operation.

Turkey is an Iranian target, as part of broader Soviet-sponsored operations against the southern flank of NATO. With Iran providing the drugs and the financing, East bloc intelligence, through Bulgaria, is set on re-launching operations within Turkey itself.

There is ample evidence that arms are also being smuggled along the same routes. It is expected that both the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA and the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), whose operations have been curtailed in recent months, will be reactivated. The PKK was badly hit when, under various economic and political pressures, Syria's Hafez al Assad decided it was temporarily useful to have good relations with Turkey. As a result, the PKK was told to move out. Instead of launching its terrorist raids from northern Syria, whence it killed more than 500 persons during 1987, it has had to do so from northern Iran.

The issue of the PKK is expected to be raised during Özal's trip to Tehran. Whether, it will lead to an effective curtailment of their activities is, however, another matter. On Feb. 16, the Iranians said they would consider stopping the PKK, provided that Turkey clamps down on the activities of anti-Khomeini Iranian exiles. But, Iranian-Turkish relations are certainly not based on matters of mutual interests; much will depend on what Moscow says and wants now. So, Turkey has placed its army at the Iranian border.